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ABSTRACT

This issue focuses on "Toys and Games." Students are encouraged to explore games of the past, particularly from the early 1900s. Activities include playing games from the past and making toys. Feature articles describe toys and games through time, Iowa-made toys, ethnic games, how play imitates work, and how world events impact play. Several photographs are provided to illustrate past games and toys. (RJC)

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Goldfinch

Iowa History for Young People

Volume 19, Number 2 Winter 1997 • $3

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2

LET'S PLAY!

What toys do you think yesterdays' kids enjoyed? Expensive china dolls or paper dolls cut from pages of mail order catalogs? Electric train sets or corn cobs with chicken feathers stuck in one end to make darts? Or sticks that became horses, rafts or Excalibur in a child's imagination...

This issue of *The Goldfinch* looks at toys and games–purchased, invented and imagined–Iowa kids enjoyed from territorial times through World War II. As you play your way through the stories, notice how toys and their purposes have changed over time. Discover many factors,from wars to television, that influenced what kids played. See how pioneer Iowa kids turned work into play as they labored with their families to establish homesteads. Peek inside two Iowa companies that manufacture toys and find out how they got started. Play old games that may be new to you, knowing that old becomes new each time the game is played.

Catching a sneak thief!
Two Ruthven, Iowa boys played cops and robbers 1910. What role-play games do you enjoy today?

Ready...
Set...
Tag–you're *It*!

3
-The Editor

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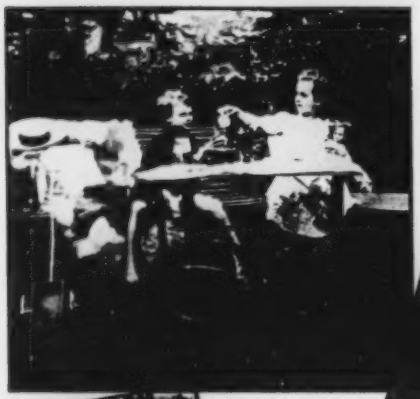

Top: Mignon and Donald enjoy a tea party, July 18, 1900.
Right: This ca. 1914 portrait of Roy McFarland was taken when he was about six years old.
Left: An Iowa City girl strolls with her dolls in this pre-1920 photo.

Features

4 Toys and Games Through Time
8 Iowa-made T

Employees finish and package toys in the Ertl Company's Dubuque plant, ca. 1955. (photo courtesy Theresa Sauser)

10 Iowa's Play Environment
14 Ethnic Games
20 Turning Work Into Play
24 World Events Impact Play

Departments

2 Let's Play!
22 History Makers
26 Goldfinch Fiction: Red Rover

Activities

12 Play Yesterday's Games Today!
16 Make Tops and Whirly Cobs
18 Dear Diary...
30 History Mystery

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Toys and Games Through Time

Some of the games Iowa kids played in the mid to late 1800s may sound familiar—jump rope, marbles, hopscotch and pick-up sticks. Others, like Fox and Geese or Ante-Over, may not.

Many traditional games have European origins, brought to New England by immigrants, then to the midwest as the nation grew. Other games were already here, played by Native Americans for generations.

Historically, toys appear to have been less important to children than games played with others and play that did not require specific objects. "Store-bought" (manufactured) toys were rare. Sometimes simple toys like ceramic marbles, wooden tops, ice skates or dolls occupied spare moments. Children created toys from ordinary household stuff—especially during the low-tech, pre-Nintendo days of the 19th century. Items adults discarded as junk often became kids' favorite playthings.

John Zug plays a drum made out of an empty oatmeal carton, 1914.

Pocket knives provided hours of fun for boys as they carved or played mumble-the-peg, a target game. Wooden clothespins became soldiers for kids acting out famous battles. With a little work, scrap lumber or fallen tree branches became stilts. A trunk full of old clothes opened the door to a world of make-believe.

Schoolyard Tug-of-war, ca. 1920.

Recess!

Playground equipment wasn't installed in schoolyards until about 1910. Instead, kids

Playground games, Page Center, Iowa, 1907.

explored creeks, ditches, hills and forests surrounding their schools. They climbed trees, chased butterflies and dug holes in the dirt. They also played a variety of folk games passed down through generations. Singing games (like *London Bridge* and *Skip to My Lou*), intellectual contests (like guessing games and spelling bees) and ethnic games (often rhyming games in their family's native language) were popular.

Outdoor games helped kids burn off excess energy. Some playground games helped kids (whether they knew it or not!) behave. *Mother May I* taught kids to be polite when asking others for favors. *Follow the Leader* and *Simon Says* taught kids to copy another's actions when they didn't know what to do. Playground games assimilated and Americanized immigrant children. Games taught kids to play fair, follow rules, cooperate and compromise.

Growth of Toy Industry

Yesterday's toys weren't all fun and games. Most early toys were designed to teach. Toys and games helped children develop physical skills, morals, knowledge and good social behavior. The first board game produced in the U.S., for example, cultivated counting skills and character. Children moved game pieces along a path of spaces marked Truth, Gratitude and Generosity as they played *Mansion of Happiness* (1843). They hoped to avoid spaces labeled Cruelty or Poverty!

Manufactured toys were more available after the Civil War, although the majority of children in

Playing dress-up has been a favorite pastime across generations. Here, Officer McGinnis investigates a fortune-telling tent. Ruthven, Iowa, ca. 1910.

Bruce Hiscock on a tire swing.

the late 19th century could only dream of the toys they saw in shops and catalogs. However, increased circulation of catalogs and kids' magazines in the 1870s suggest adults were taking a new interest in child's play. Parents placed greater importance on toys for their children's development, education and happiness. By the early 20th century, a new definition of childhood was emerging. Families depended less on their children's labor, giving children more free time. Prosperous parents indulged their kids with store-bought toys and children became more dependent on toys in their play.

As the toy industry grew to meet increased demands, toymakers began producing playthings that were strictly for fun. No longer were toys designed primarily to educate. Mail order catalogs and the nation's expanding railroad system made manufactured toys easy to obtain.

During the 20th century, family sizes decreased and free time increased. Movies and TV have had a huge impact on what children play. From the Lone Ranger to Luke Skywalker, kids imitate their favorite characters and play with toys manufactured to correspond with popular shows. Toy manufacturers learned that favorite characters became hot-selling toys. Movie makers learned that toys are good advertising.

Today, kids love high-tech games designed to teach as they thrill. But some adults

Be Creative!

Kids often played with paper dolls. Punch-out paper doll books were available, but kids also enjoyed creating their own. You can, too! Cut figures from catalogs or magazines. Cut out clothes for all kinds of activities, or make your own using construction paper or wallpaper samples. Draw or glue pictures of furniture on scrapbook pages for household scenes, or create outdoor scenes like soccer games and camping trips!

These paper dolls, from the SHSI (Iowa City) Collection, were cut from a Munsingwear advertisement.

Kids loved making and walking on stilts. This photo was taken ca. 1903.

fear kids are losing out because they are entertained *by* toys and games (like video games and toys from movies) instead of using their imaginations to create their own fun.

–Millie K. Frese

Find Out For Yourself!

One way to find out about yesterday's toys and games is to ask questions! Talk to your grandparents, great-grandparents or other older members of your community. Ask them these questions and any others you think of!

1. When were you born?
2. What toys did you have when you were a kid?
3. What games did you play?
4. With whom did you play?

Show your grandparents or other older friends your toys and see how they compare. Send us a story about your discoveries and we'll send you a prize! Address your letters to: ***The Goldfinch*** Toy Stories, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Ave., Iowa City, IA 52240.

A boy and his doll, ca. 1925.

Iowa-Made Toys

Iowa is perhaps best known for its agricultural industry. However farm toys made by two Iowa toy companies show that agriculture isn't "all work and no play." Since the 1940s, the Ertl Company in Dyersville and Slik-Toys in Lansing have brought smiles to the faces of young Iowans and those young at heart.

Ertl brothers Allan, John, Joe and Fred, Jr., with an assortment of Ertl toys in 1970.

The Ertl Company

In 1945, Fred Ertl, Sr., was out of work but he wasn't out of ideas. He started a toy company in the basement of his Dubuque home. His first employees were his wife and their five sons whose ages ranged from 15 to 6. With their help, he made miniature tractors, cars and airplanes out of aluminum he melted in his furnace. His wife was the designated painter and the boys assembled toys after school. It was a family business and the eldest son, Fred Jr., told *The Goldfinch*, "Everybody pitched in something." He recalled how the company's youngest employee, John, was put to work. "We used to put on decals in the kitchen and John would carry the toys to the other room to dry. They didn't dry fast like they do now."

In the beginning, nearly all of the business was replica toys, and most of them were farm equipment models. A year after the Ertl Company began, it signed its first contract to make toys for the John Deere Company. Soon the company outgrew its facilities in Dubuque and moved to Dyersville in 1959.

The Ertl Company saw many changes in the 1970s. It expanded into plastic model kits and electronic products like tape recorders and children's phonographs. The company also added manufacturing plants in Mexico and China where most of the toys are made today. In addition, Fred Ertl, Jr., along with other toy manufacturers across the country, implemented a toy safety code removing sharp edges and points and labeling toys for appropriate ages. Through the years, Ertl toys have also gotten bigger and more costly.

Today, the Ertl Company also produces dolls, collectible animals, Star Trek model kits and Dukes of Hazzard model cars.

by Lin Ly

The Lansing Company

Tucked away in Lansing Company's 100 year history is its brief stint as an Iowa toy manufacturer. Founded by Jeremiah Turner, the company first started as a button factory in 1897. Little did Turner know that his grandson, Leo Hufschmidt, would lead the company into the jewelry and toy business in 1908 and 1942, respectively.

In the beginning, the toys, called Slik-Toys, were simple wooden cars and trucks. The company had been making wooden costume jewelry and found that its shaper and drill machines could be easily adapted to make toys. They welcomed this new kind of work because war shortages had slowed the button business. Between 1942 and 1945, Lansing made 30,000 toys daily from scraps of wood only 10-12 inches long. When World War II ended and metal became available again, the company switched to aluminum because it was sturdier than wood.

Before the Lansing Company sold Slik-Toys in 1959, it offered a complete set of model farm equipment as well as trains, cars, and trucks. Slik-Toys didn't move far. Its new owner, Armor Industries Inc., is also based in Lansing, Iowa. While Slik-Toys are found in toy stores across the country, manufacturing has never left Iowa.

Norbert Spinner, a former Lansing employee, recalled, "When I was in the design-making of toys, I enjoyed planning and getting the sample toys ready for production."

Today, Slik-Toys, under Armor Industries, is smaller and produces primarily farm toys like tractors, mowers, plows, and rakes.

Lansing, Iowa, ca. 1920

Visit the Museum!

Dyersville, Iowa calls itself the "Farm Toy Capital of the World." It is home to three farm toy manufacturers and the National Farm Toy Museum, established in 1986. Annually, more than 35,000 toy enthusiasts visit the two-story museum filled with 30,000 farm toys, trucks and banks. There's also a small movie theater and gift shop. Special attractions for kids include interactive dioramas, a farm safety display and a play area. *–Lin Ly*

Iowa's Play Environment

by Millie K. Frese

Children often played with miniatures of things adults used. In this 1920s photo, Lenore Rickels uses a toy iron, imitating one of her mother's chores. She lived in Atkins, Iowa.

With all the wide-open space Iowa settlers encountered, you'd think only the horizons could have limited what kids played.

Not so.

One early settler recalled, "Although my new home was in the wide-open spaces, I lost my freedom to run and play outside...I could not leave the swept area in front of the house unless one of my grandparents was with me, and I was not allowed in the garden because of the danger of rattlesnakes."

Hazards of pioneer life often limited what kids could do for fun. Other factors, like gender and money, also influenced what kids played.

Children often imitated adult work when they played. Adults believed play should teach children–especially girls–habits of hard work. Girls learned how to keep house by playing house with miniature tea sets, doll houses and kitchenware. If they had no toys representing these items, they improvised.

Joanne Meusburger, who grew up on a Sac County farm in the late 1930s, described her first doll as a "cotton-stuffed cutie with a painted cardboard face." She turned an evergreen tree with shady branches into a playhouse. Crates and stumps became tables, chairs and beds. Broken or discarded household items found a new home

Two kids enjoy a snowy Iowa day, ca. 1940

under her playhouse tree. Empty cartons and tin cans stocked playhouse pantry shelves on low branches.

Guns, tools, balls and marbles were "boys' toys."

John Zug playing marbles on a Des Moines street, 1929.

James Langdon Hill, who grew up in Grinnell in the 1850s, knew spring had arrived when boys brought out their marbles. No game, according to Hill, required more organization than marbles.

"Its lingo was understood only by boys," Hill wrote in his book, *My First Years as a Boy*. Boys voted on rules to govern their games, then agreed to observe them. However, it was common for the game to end with bitter feelings which were sometimes resolved with fists.

Families in the 19th and early 20th centuries had little money for toys. Doris Cresap grew up on a Des Moines County farm during The Great Depression of the 1930s. "We made our own entertainment," she said. "We knew we didn't have money to buy lots of things, but we always had food on the table and we never felt deprived."

The barnyard was Cresap's playground. Found items were her toys. "We'd put a beef bone from a roast on the end of a stick to make horses," she said. "Sometimes we'd roll an old buggy wheel around with a narrow board."

Cresap walked along the top of board fences surrounding their cowlot like a balance beam. She and her brother climbed the barn roof, going across the ridge row (peak) to the cupola. "We straddled the lightning rod cable and held on!" she said. "Mom got a few gray hairs because of us. I guess you could have called me a tomboy!"

Many playthings crossed gender and socio-economic lines. Girls and boys alike spun tops, played ball games, tag and singing games, and enjoyed skating and sledding.

The birth of Barbie, G.I. Joe and other action figures reinforced gender stereotypes in toys. Girls' dolls invited role play in a realm where fashion and dating were primary concerns. Boys toys encouraged fantasy play in violent galaxies.

Wilma and Hazel play with dolls and corn cobs near West Liberty, 1905.

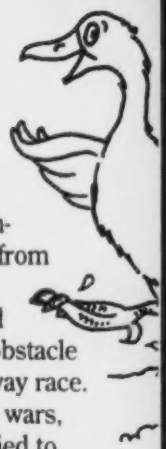
Play Yesterday's Games Today!

by Millie K. Frese

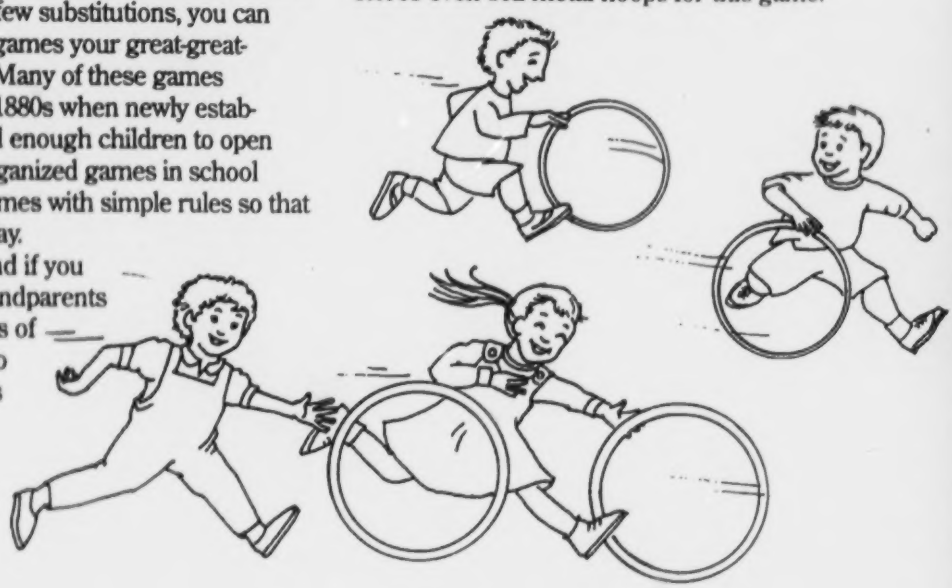
Playing yesterday's games can be a lot of fun! Sometimes finding materials to play old favorites can be tricky. For example, people don't have metal rims from old wooden wheels to discard so kids can play hoops and sticks. But with a little imagination and a few substitutions, you can play the same kinds of games your great-great-grandparents enjoyed! Many of these games became popular in the 1880s when newly established communities had enough children to open schools. Kids played organized games in school yards during recess–games with simple rules so that kids of all ages could play.

Try these games, and if you like them, ask your grandparents or other older members of your community how to play more of the games they enjoyed as kids!

Hoops & Sticks

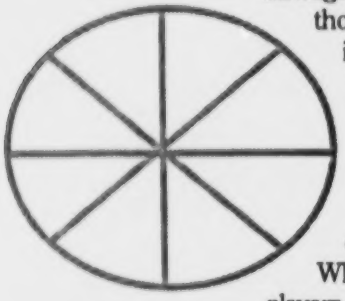


Pioneer kids used metal rims from abandoned wagon wheels or the metal bands from the middle or top of a woden barrel. The hoop may be struck by a stick or by hand to keep it rolling. Players may set up an obstacle course or run their hoops in a straight-away race. Pioneer children sometimes played hoop wars, where kids divided into two teams and tried to drive their hoops past "the enemy." Knocked over hoops were casualties in this playground battle. For your modern-day version of hoops and sticks, try substituting a Hula Hoop or an old metal bicycle tire for a wagon wheel rim. Some athletic stores even sell metal hoops for this game.



Fox & Geese

This game doesn't require any "antique" equipment–just a lot of new snow! Stomp a large circle (20-50 feet in diameter, depending on the number of players and space available) into the snow. Stomp through the circle as though cutting a pie into eight sections.

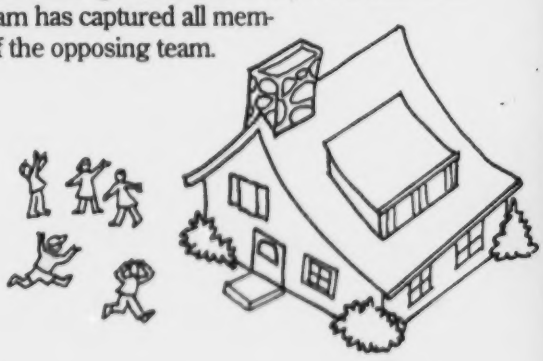


Choose one player to be *It*. *It* stands at the center of the circle and the players line up on the circle's outer edge. When *It* gives a signal, players must run to avoid being tagged. The trick is that all players, including *It*, run only along the lines trampled in the snow. A player who is tagged, or who runs out of the lines, becomes the new *It*. For a summer version of this game, try marking the course with sidewalk chalk on a large paved area. Or, at the beach, stomp your course in the sand.

Art by Mary Moye-Rowley

Ante Over

Many adults who attended country schools remember playing this game over the school house at recess. Today, school buildings are too big for *Ante Over* so try this game over a detached garage, shed or small barn. Kids divide into two teams, lining up on opposite sides of the building. One team captain throws a ball over the building, shouting "Ante over!" If a member of the opposing team catches the ball, the catching team runs around either or both ends of the building. As they run, the player with the ball uses it to tag as many of the opposing team members as possible before they can change sides. If no one catches the ball, it is tossed back with the warning "Ante over!" Play continues until one team has captured all members of the opposing team.



Ethnic Games!

by Millie K. Frese

During Indian Week at the Sac and Fox Settlement School, you'll find kids playing traditional Meskwaki games.

"Ordinarily, you'll find Meskwaki kids playing Nintendo after school," said Johnathan Buffalo, tribal historian. "That's how much things have changed."

Traditionally, Meskwaki boys and girls played a ring and pin game by catching wooden cones on a long, narrow metal pin.

"It looks easy," Buffalo said. "But I could never get the cones on the stake." If this game, like others in Meskwaki tradition, teaches a lesson, Buffalo believes it is patience.

Meskwaki kids played a moccasin game by hiding an object in one of four moccasins. "It was a game of both chance and skill," Buffalo said. The player guessing which moccasin held the hidden object carefully studied the eyes and facial expressions of the player who hid the object. "It makes you a good judge of character," Buffalo said. "You learn to read people."

Some games were specifically for men or women. Men, for example, played LaCrosse, a game played on a large field with a ball and sticks with ends like a small racquet. Women played Double Ball. Two oblong balls were weighted with sand and connected with buckskin. Women used sticks to throw the ball over bases about 50 yards apart.

"Men wouldn't be caught dead playing a woman's game," Buffalo said. He believes his mother's generation, growing up in the mid-1920s to mid-1930s, was the last to regularly play these and other traditional games.

Swedish immigrant children coming to America brought with them legends, stories, rhyming and singing games—and little else.

"The people who came over were practical," said Betty Larson of Swedesburg. "What to take and what to leave behind—it was a heart-rending decision."

Immigrants brought food and clothing for the six to eight week journey. They were poor when they left Sweden seeking a better life. Bringing toys was not a priority.

Larson's late husband, Ferdinand, was born in Iowa in 1904. His grandparents immigrated in 1867. Ferdinand learned Swedish from them, along with traditional games.

Few today remember the traditional rhyming games, Larson said. "What we remember today is a combination language," she continued, spelling Swedish words phonetically as she demonstrated a child's finger play.

Toma-tut (point to thumb)

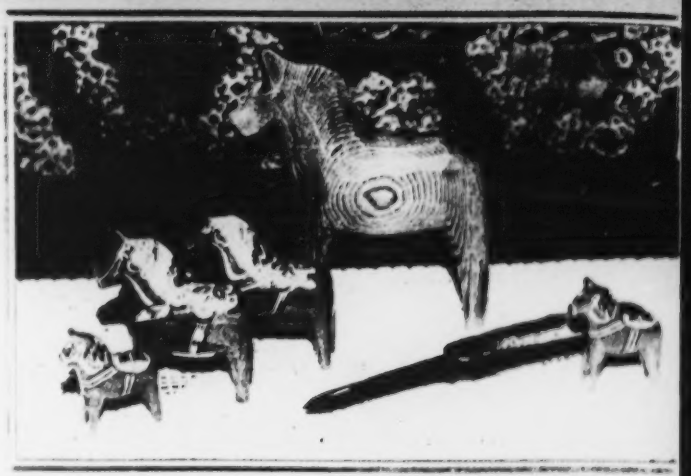
Slika-put (point to index finger–the one that cleans out a bowl of icing!)

Long-a-man (point to the middle finger)

Hjarta-le-han (point to the ring finger as a symbol of love)

Lille-vicka-finga! (raise voice to squeaky pitch and point to the little finger)

"The little kids always laugh," Larson said. "They like it!"



According to Swedish legend, a 13th century soldier carved the first Dala horse to trade for food. The distinctive horses became more than toys for village children--they became a symbol of Sweden.

Today, Iowa kids of Czecho-slovakian descent play with the same toys and observe the same customs as other kids in the state. But during holidays, traditional Czech games recall their heritage.

Handmade ornaments adorn traditional Czech Christmas trees. Sometimes parents hide a pickle-shaped ornament on the decorated tree for kids to find. In another Christmas game, children place small candles in nutshells. After lighting the candles, they float them in a tub of water. The player whose candle burns the longest wins.

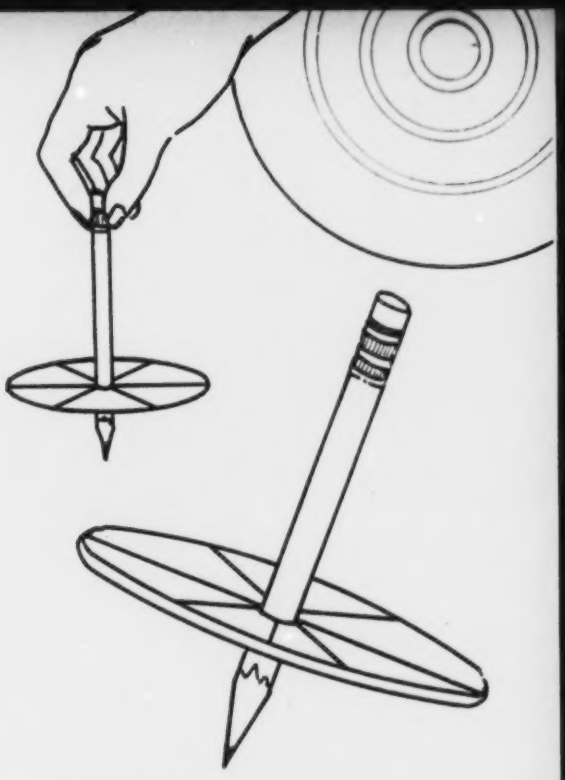
Volunteers at the Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids demonstrate cornhusk doll-making.

CEDAR RAPIDS

For an Easter game, boys braided willow wands and "switched" the girls. Legend says that the switching drove away mischief. It also symbolized casting off winter bleakness in preparation for spring.

Czech-American pioneers made puppets from wood. Children and their parents also fashioned toys from fabric, corn husks and clay, and made simple musical instruments.

Make a TOY

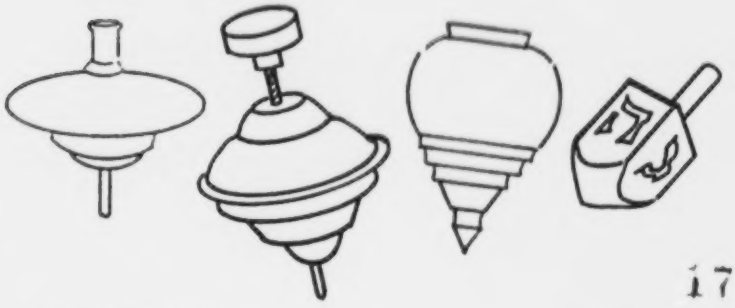


Spinning tops have been a favorite childhood toy for centuries.

Stand a top on end and it will fall over. But give it a good spin and it will defy gravity until its meandering dance slows and it clatters to a stop. With a simple top comes a child's first lessons about friction, torque and momentum. Who says toys have to be complicated to be educational?

Archeologists have discovered tops dating as far back as 2000 B.C. These examples are rare, but wooden tops starting from the late 1800s are common. Some tops were commercially manufactured. More often, tops were made at home by parents and grandparents. Innovative kids created their own.

Try these three simple steps to make your own top!



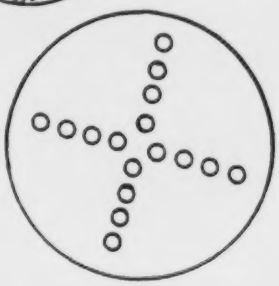
1 ***trace and cut a circle from cardboard (a mug or bowl works well)***

2 ***use paint, markers or crayons to add your own designs***

3 ***poke a short, sharpened pencil exactly through the center and spin!***

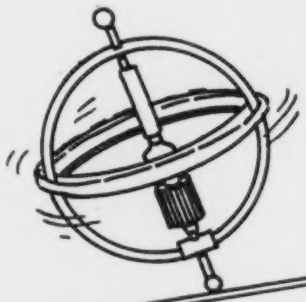
Art by Mary Moye-Rowley

Try different designs and see what happens when the top is spun. Can you combine two colors to make a third color?



There are many different kinds of tops but they all require rotational force or torque to get them going. Once you get a top going, it will continue to spin until all the rotational force you put into it is removed by friction. You can increase the spinning time of your top by reducing friction. The point of the top and the surface it is spinning on are one source of friction. The air that flows around the spinning top is another. For a longer spin, make sure the top's point meets a very smooth surface and that the top is made of a smooth material.

A gyroscope, shown here, is actually a spinning top held inside a bracket. It can balance on a string.



Bruce Carlson grew up on a farm in Plymouth County. There, during the first decade of the 1900s, he learned the magic of turning ordinary junk into something fun. "We didn't have any 'spensive toys like the kids from town," wrote Carlson in his book, *Me 'n Wesley*. "Fact is we didn't have any cheap ones." Carlson played with toys made from junk found in cowlots, creeks and woods.

Whirly-cobs were among Carlson's favorite homemade toys. To make one, shell an ear of dried corn. Break off a little of the wide end and stick 2-4 chicken feathers into the soft center. With a good toss, the cob spins through the sky with a whirring sound. Whirly-cobs are good for dozens of throws–until the feathers break, the cob splits or the dog runs off with the whole thing!

by Amy Ruth

Dear Diary . . .

Sarah Jane Kimball grew up in rural Jones County in Eastern Iowa. As a young girl, she and her three brothers and two sisters helped their parents run the family farm and farmhouse. When she was in her 20s, Sarah began teaching school. While she was teaching, she boarded with her students. When school was not in session, she returned to the family farm. She had several hobbies, including music and drawing, and enjoyed visiting with friends and neighbors. Read about the toys and games she detailed in her diary.

May 20, 1858

At [recess] Marcia Brown, Nancy Converse, Elizabeth Shaffer played Indian with their hair all over their faces and a hatchet for a tomahwak. Marcia took an old tin pan and dust pan and went to drumming. They made lots of noise.

December 5, 1861

I believe I will stop writing now and go and play my accordion. How I love music.

In addition to journaling, Sarah liked to draw. Her "toys" were pencils and a sketchpad. She drew many scenes from nature, including the fruit above and the bird to the right.

January 10, 1862

Here we are Merrill [her brother] and I sitting by the table he ciphering and I have just finished fixing Ellen's doll.

February 7, 1862

[The Aldriches visited] and they brought a curiosity to us in the shape of what they called California Beans. They look much like bread crumbs. Mrs. Aldrich requested me to get her a large glass bottle which I did and she put the beans into it. Then warming some water and sweetening it with some molasses put it into the bottled and soon it began to work, the little beans dancing up and down in the water.

February 21, 1862

Have been busy the past three days making two dolls and dressing them for Addie and Emmons Horton [neighbor girls].

March 15, 1862

This morning we were busy pasting in our scrapbooks.

April 1, 1864

By many little tricks today we tried to April Fool each other.

July 6, 1867

Early this morning Father, Ann and I went to Anamosa. We bought some pictures and cards for the scholars and each a large glass marble. I shall give mine to Lewy Combs [a student].

October 4, 1867

Today I have been fixing up a [shadow] box with my childish playthings and shall frame it. I want to keep them as they remind me of happy days long gone by.

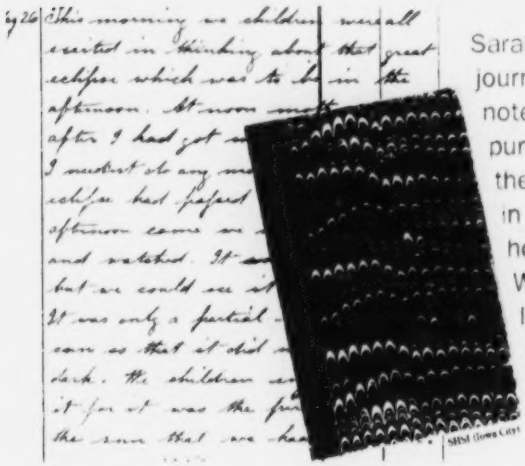
Be a diary detective

Sarah Jane Kimball as an older woman.

Sarah Jane's diary tells us about ways she and her siblings and friends amused themselves in the 1860s. You will notice from the entries on page 18 that she rarely mentioned store-bought toys. Sarah and other young people like her enjoyed homemade toys and games because they were easier to come by and less expensive. To learn more about Sarah, study her diary entries again, and then answer the questions below.

What do you think of the game Sarah mentioned in her May 20, 1858 entry?

Why did Sarah devote so much space in her diary to California beans? What do we call this toy today?



Sarah kept her journal in lined notebooks she purchased at the drugstore in her hometown of Wyoming, Iowa. This is a sample of her writing.

How do you celebrate April Fool's Day? What kind of tricks and games do you think Sarah and her friends played?

Why do you think Sarah made dolls and doll clothes, instead of buying them?

If you were to make a shadow box of your toys, like Sarah did in 1867, what would you include?

Turning Work Into Play

Growing up in territorial Iowa was hard work. Toys were scarce and organized games played infrequently. Instead, play in the late 1830s honed skills important for survival.

Pioneer Iowans turned necessary tasks into opportunities for fun. Barn raisings and log rollings combined feasting, foot races and contests of strength with the day's work.

Housewarmings offered time for games and dancing. Quilting, apple paring and husking bees mixed work with pleasure as neighbors helped each other. The goal of "bees" was to finish the job, but people liked these work socials because they could get together, talk and play. Spelling bees challenged people of all ages intellectually in the context of community fun.

Yesterday's Anglers

A family fishes and plays with a toy sailboat in Clear Lake, Iowa.

1924 Sewing Bee

Lenore and Robert Rickels play while their mother, grandmother and sister sew.

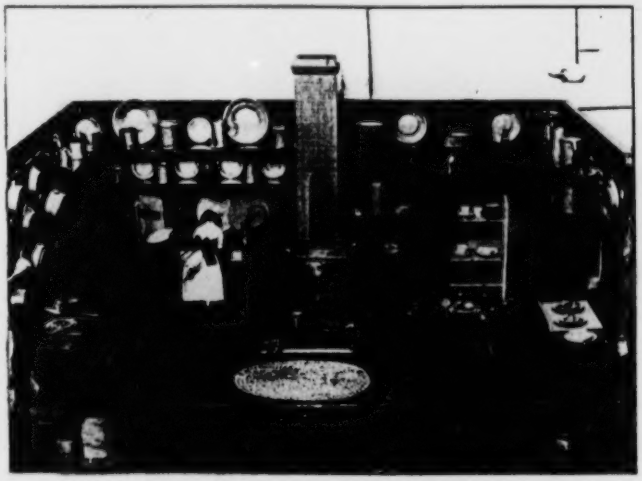
Many skills, such as hunting, fishing, trapping and boating were both work and play. Kids engaged in the sport of the activity while acquiring food necessary for their family.

A 19th century pioneer child, Hamlin Garland was only 10 years old when his father made him plow the Iowa prairie ten hours a day. He amused himself during the strenuous hours of work by singing, whistling and studying clouds forming in the endless blue sky. He listened to bird songs, played with lizards he uncovered as he plowed and watched small animals play in the sea of grass. Perhaps these pastimes didn't make the work easier, but they made it more enjoyable!

by Millie K. Frese

Homestead conditions challenged Iowa settlers in other ways. Bad weather and poor roads often isolated pioneers from their neighbors. Long winters kept people indoors, confined in small spaces. Often there wasn't enough money for necessities much less extras like toys. Kids played with homemade things like corn husk or rag dolls, carved wooden items, and wore handmade stockings and mittens when they played in the snow.

Patchwork quilts symbolize the "make-do" nature of a homesteader's life. Girls learned essential sewing skills as they pieced their first quilts. Fabric scraps and worn clothing became patches in their quilts. Patches were sewn into blocks, the basic pattern repeated throughout the quilt. Pioneers used handpieced quilts as blankets to keep warm, padding around furniture when they moved and to hang as makeshift walls in one-room houses. Quilts were an artistic expression for pioneer women who could make something old new again, turning something necessary into something beautiful.



Toys Imitate Life

These Amana dolls "work" in a miniature community kitchen complete with furniture and cookware.

Sometimes religious beliefs and customs demanded that play be productive.

In the Amana Colonies, a community defined by its religion and communal way of life, The Society of True Inspirationists believed that idleness in all forms was sinful. Work and attending church services occupied most waking hours. During the small amount of time left over, people developed hobbies or crafts which produced something useful.

Amana kids were expected to help with household chores. During school recesses young children sometimes played in sandboxes or played singing games in German, the traditional language of the colonies. Older girls and boys practiced knitting. In the winter, young girls played with dolls and doll houses filled with handmade furniture. Boys trapped in fields and streams surrounding the villages–a pastime considered valuable because it contributed food to the society.

Friday Fest Volunteers
Monique Lothi, Lindsay Stinson and Laura Putney

Monique Lothi, 10, usually spends her free time riding her bike, roller blading or reading. On July 25, 1997, Monique, along with Laura Putney, 11, and Lindsay Stinson, 12, turned summer play into work as Friday Fest volunteers at the Iowa Historical Building in Des Moines. Traditional games, the theme for the day, attracted 504 visitors of all ages.

"It's not hard to play with little kids," Monique said. "It's harder with older kids, but you get to know them through the games."

Sarah Macht, museum education coordinator, welcomed the youth volunteers. "Volunteering helps them get involved in history and make it their own," she said. Youth volunteers are enthusiastic, Macht continued. "They have a lot of energy and get along well with the other kids."

Bringing outside activities–like jump rope, circle games, and the parachute game–inside was a challenge. Macht chose these games because they allow kids who are strangers to comfortably play together. "The parachute game is a newer game, but it helps kids to break the ice and get to know one another," Macht explained. She also chose games such as jacks and pick-up sticks allowing newcomers to join at any time.

Monique helped twirl a long, single rope as Shanelle Harris, 8, stood alongside, her hands and eyes moving in unison with the rope's steady rhythm. Shanelle jumped in as other players chanted her favorite rhyme, in time with the *snap, snap!* of the rope on the hard floor:

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,
turn around.

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,
touch the ground.
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,
shine your shoes.
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,
read the news...

Shanelle, a third grader at Monroe Elementary in Des Moines, emerged hot and breathless after a miss. The rope started again, and another jumper took her place.

"I like to read, watch movies and play computer games," said Shanelle, who attended Friday Fest with her summer day camp. While jumping rope is considered a traditional game, it's not new to Shanelle. "We jump rope all the time," she said, running to the back of the line of jumpers as the game and the chants continued.

Lindsay, a seventh grader at Weeks Middle School in Des Moines, volunteered because, she said, "I just like seeing kids having fun." She helped visitors sign in, twirled a jump rope, and helped kids have fun playing the games without losing control.

"Volunteering helps [kids] get involved in history and make it their own."

--Sarah Macht

"There were a lot of kids," she said. "But there weren't too many fights!"

Activities during Friday Fest were similar, Lindsay said, "to games played back when there wasn't TV."

"Some of the stuff kids do today–like Nintendo–is just something to do, usually by yourself," she described. "But you play the older games *with* lots of kids, and you can make up different ways to play them."

Laura, a sixth grader at Urbandale Middle School, worked at the game check-out table, helping kids learn how to play jacks and pick-up-sticks. "It's fun helping kids play games," Laura said. "Hopefully when they go home, they can play these games with their friends."

-Millie K. Frese

Kids play the parachute game at Friday Fest

World Events Impact Play

If you were asked to create a new game or toy based on a current event, what would you make?

In the 1800s, families played board games based on historic events. Some examples are "The New Game of the American Revolution" (1844), "Fort Sumter" (1870), and "Round the World with Nellie Bly" (1890). In 1910, you could buy the "Panama Canal Game." After Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic in 1927, shops sold "Lindy's Flying Game" along with a host of other airplane race and air mail games, plus plane models.

Some events make ordinary toys more popular. In 1902 a newspaper cartoon showed Theodore Roosevelt refusing to shoot a bear cub while in Mississippi to help settle a border dispute. A quick-thinking shopkeeper put a "Teddy's Bear" sign on one of the stuffed animals that his wife made and soon everyone wanted one.

In the early 1900s, German toy makers could export toys to America cheaper than many toy makers here could make them. Soon half the toys sold in the United States came from Germany. But when Germany became involved in World War I, the numbers of imported dolls,

Thelma Slaughter, 2, holds a "Teddy's Bear" in this 1909 photo. Teddy Bears became popular after President Theodore Roosevelt's encounter with a cub.

doll heads, lead soldier figures, and other toys slowed and stopped. Some American factories installed new electric machines to speed up production. Others competed by hiring children as young as 14 and paying them 21 to 25 cents an hour. Factory owners joined together to lobby Congress and to tell consumers the patriotic advantages of buying American-made dolls and toys.

World War II brought more challenges. Most companies stopped making toy soldiers in 1942 when the government demanded that lead and other metals be used only for supplies needed by real soldiers. Some toy companies converted their factories to make war items. Others made toys of wood or experimented with mixtures of sawdust and glue, or with a new material called plastic.

New bicycles, steel wagons, and roller skates couldn't be made. Some old toys disap-

25

peared when children sacrificed their metal playthings to community scrap drives.

Brightly colored, realistically styled paper and cardboard toys were offered in their place. Soldiers, nurses, tanks and other vehicles, forts, houses, animals, historic panoramas and celebrities were among the many items offered as cut-outs, punch-outs, paper dolls and ready-to-assemble kits. Dress-up outfits imitated military and nurse uniforms. Toy guns were equipped with noisemakers so they sounded like machine guns.

After the war, metal soldier sets joined plastic ones on store shelves. However, many parents and children were tired of war and preferred other toys. Toy pistols and holsters remained popular through the 1950s and 1960s because they imitated favorite television programs about the Old West. During the late 1960s anti-war protesters succeeded in removing most toy guns, as well as military figures like G.I. Joe, from store shelves.

Toy production isn't influenced only by wars and political events. Movies, radio, television and computers prompted new toys and new ways of selling toys. During the 1930s companies like the Disney studio discovered they could make money by licensing their characters so that they could appear, not just on the screen, but as toys and on other items.

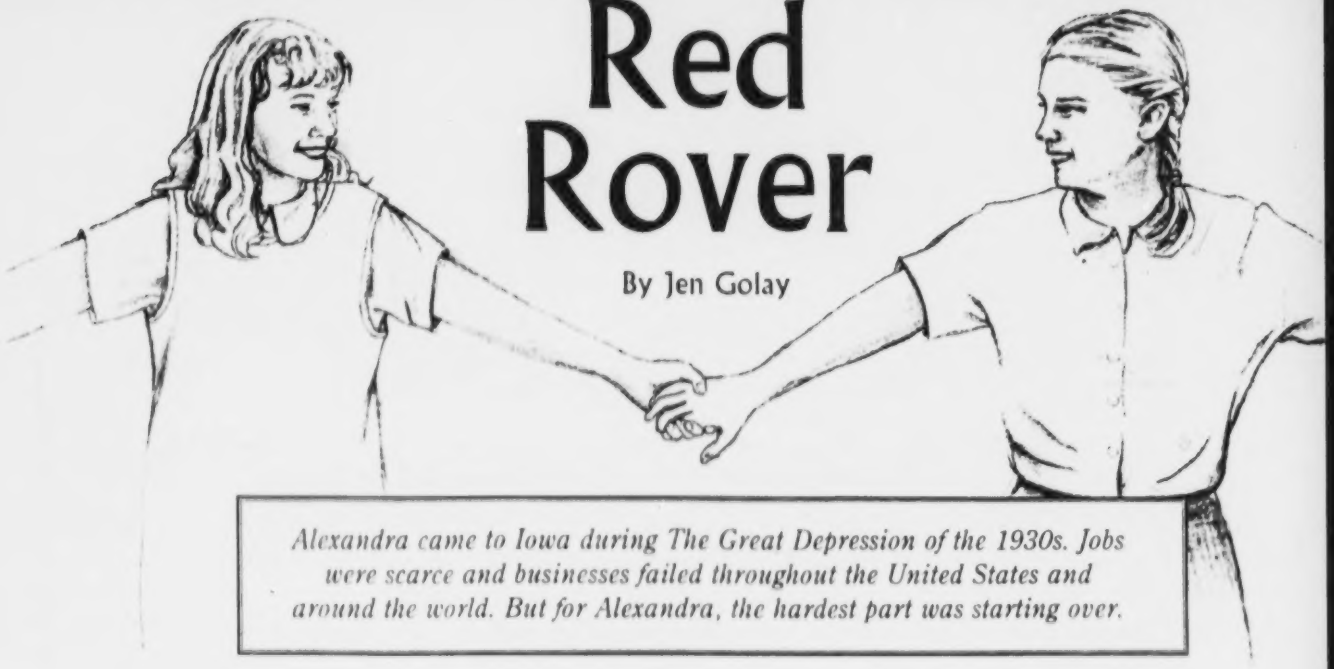
The 1977 movie *Star Wars* is the most phenomenal example of character licensing. By 1984 three hundred million *Star Wars* toys had been sold. The movie also changed how children played. Instead of imitating familiar adult activities of the past or present, *Star Wars* toys imitate an imaginary event in an imaginary place.

Many of the games and toys that were invented in response to past events are now collectors' items in museums and antique shops. Who knows? Maybe games or toys you play with–or invent!–will be sought-after collectibles in the future.

Maybe this Amana boy (1932) was dreaming of a trans-Atlantic flight!

Red Rover

By Jen Golay



Alexandra came to Iowa during The Great Depression of the 1930s. Jobs were scarce and businesses failed throughout the United States and around the world. But for Alexandra, the hardest part was starting over.

"Alexandra!" my mother called. "Hurry up, Alexandra! Your breakfast is getting cold." I stooped over to tie my shoes. Pa had done his best to fix the worn out toes, but the patches still showed through the new coat of black polish. Ma let the hem down on my old school dress. I knew we couldn't afford to buy a new one, but hated the thought of wearing this one to school every day.

"Alexandra, what took you so long?" Ma asked as I stomped down the stairs of our rented farmhouse. "You don't want to be late on your first day of sixth grade at your new school, do you?"

"No, Ma," I answered. "But do I have to go? Couldn't you teach me here at home? I could learn my lessons in the morning and help you with the housework in the afternoon," I pleaded.

"You know you have to go to school. Now eat your breakfast."

Mush again. I knew Ma would have fixed bacon, eggs, toast and pancakes if she could have. But that didn't make mush taste any better.

"Ma, why did we have to move? Didn't we have a nice place in Missouri? Why did we have to come to Iowa?" I asked, trying not to cry.

"We had to move so that your pa could find better work," Ma said patiently. She'd

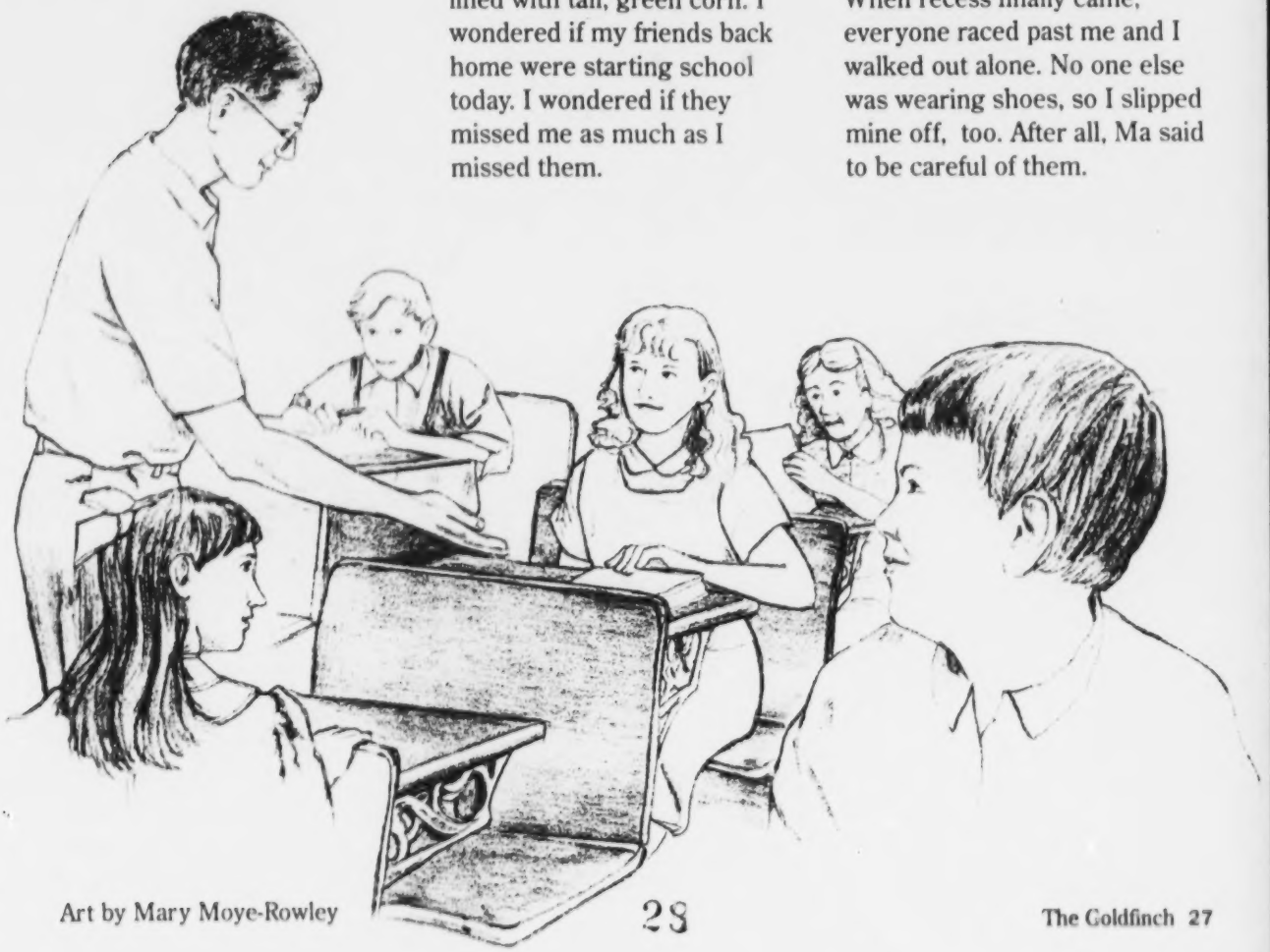
explained The Depression to me a hundred times. We were never rich, but at least before we could buy food and clothes when we needed them. Now we were thankful for simple things like flour and sugar. And mush.

"Finish your breakfast," Ma said. "You'll be late. And be careful of your shoes–they have to last all winter."

I gathered my books, lunch pail and three precious unsharpened pencils and set off down a dusty gravel road lined with tall, green corn. I wondered if my friends back home were starting school today. I wondered if they missed me as much as I missed them.

When I got to the one-room school, Mr. Schmidt showed me to my seat. Students from kindergarten through eighth grade were lined up in rows in the same classroom. They all stared as I took my place.

Morning crept by slowly. When recess finally came, everyone raced past me and I walked out alone. No one else was wearing shoes, so I slipped mine off, too. After all, Ma said to be careful of them.



Art by Mary Moye-Rowley

The warm autumn sun felt good on my face as I sat on the schoolhouse steps to watch the other kids play. Some boys had a makeshift game of baseball going with a stick and a ball of twine. The little children played ring-around-the-rosie. Others played tag. The kids in my grade were playing a game I'd never seen before.

As I watched, one of the girls pointed at me. I quickly looked down, wishing I could make myself invisible. Here it comes, I thought. They're going to tease me about my red hair or make fun of my clothes...

"Hi. I'm Marie, and this is Henry," the girl said. "We noticed you over here by yourself. What's your name?"

"Alexandra," I mumbled, still too afraid to look up.

"Hey Alexandra–do you want to come play Red Rover with us?" Henry asked.

"I don't know how," I admitted.

"That's okay–we'll teach you!" Henry said. Marie grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the others.

"Hey everybody! This is Alexandra. Let's show her how to play our game," Marie called out.

"We divide into two teams," Henry began. "Each team holds hands in a line, with the lines facing each other," he said, pointing to where the teams would line up with a big, grassy space in-between.

"When it's your team's turn, you decide together on someone to call," Henry continued. "Then you yell out 'Red Rover, Red Rover, send Marie right over!' Marie runs toward the

other team's line and tries to break through their hands. If she does, she picks someone from their team to come back with her. If she can't break through, she has to join the other team. The team with all the players at the end is the winner."

"That sounds easy," I said.

"It is!" Marie agreed. "C'mon. Join my team!"

Marie held my hand tightly. Our team laughed and cheered when one of our players broke through their line. We cheered even louder when we kept their players from breaking through our line. Then they called Marie. She let go of my hand and ran. Both sides were screaming.

"Run, Marie. Run!" we called.

"Hold on!" the other team shouted.

Their line bulged but did not break. Marie stayed on the other side.

We conferred, then began the now-familiar chant. Their runner didn't break through our line. In the excitement I forgot about being the new kid. I yelled and cheered until my voice croaked.

"Red Rover, Red Rover, send Alexandra right over!" the other team chanted. My bare feet pounded across the playground. I could hear Marie's voice above the din shouting, "Run, Alexandra!"

When I crashed through their line, I immediately grasped Marie's hand and we skipped back to our team together. I took my place between Marie and Henry, knowing I had made two new friends.

History

Learn the Lingo!

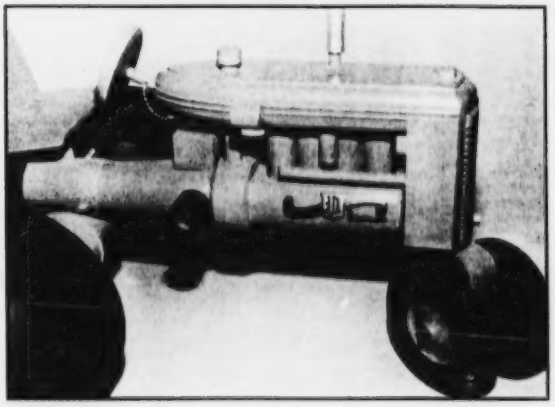
Histing ____
For Keeps ____
Hit ____
Knuckling Down ____
Roundsters ____
Shooter ____
Bowling ____
For Fair ____

1. Each player keeps the marbles that he or she shoots out of the ring.
2. Position in which one knuckle must touch the ground while shooting.
3. Attacking marble, also called a taw, glassy or monny.
4. Player knocks a marble out of the ring on a shot.
5. Playing for the fun of the game. All marbles returned to original owner.
6. When a player rolls a shot on the ground.
7. Player raises his hand from the ground when shooting.
8. The act of selecting the best location outside the playing ring for knuckling down.

Jamie Wyman played with these marbles in the 1870s and early 1880s. He lived with his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. James Hall, until moving to Des Moines with his father in 1871. Grandma Hall made the bag for him in 1870.

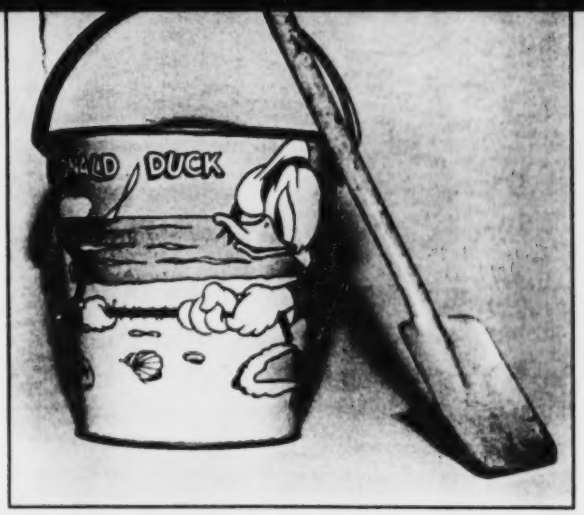
See if you can match these marble terms with their meanings!

Guess When...



This tractor, bearing a Peter Mar Quality Toys decal, was manufactured in Muscatine, Iowa. Made entirely of wood, the tractor is painted orange with black wheels and silver trim. Can you guess when it was made?

Answers:
Histing-7, For Keeps-1, Hit-4, Knuckling Down-2, Roundsters-8, Shooter-3, Bowling-6, For Fair-5.
Guess When–World War II, because toys couldn't be made of metal then, so manufacturers used wood and other materials.
Enter the 'Toons–Companies like the Disney Studio discovered they could make money by licensing their characters so they could appear on toys and other items.
Work or Play? The chore–sweeping.

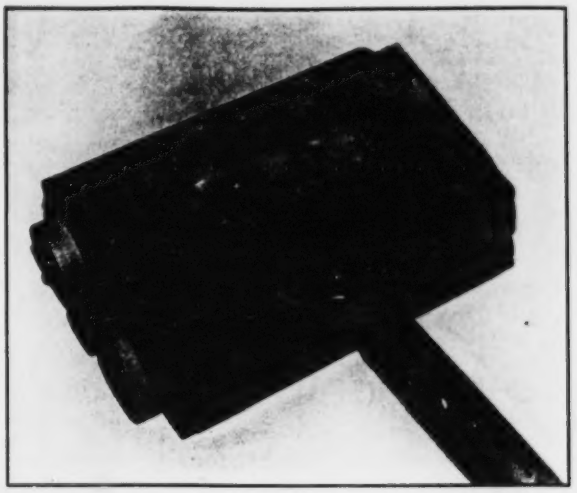


Enter the 'Toons!

Sandbox and beach toys like this metal bucket and shovel, made in 1939, were popular toys. What led to cartoon characters being depicted on toys and other products?

Work or Play?

Toys often imitated real-life work, and were good advertising for local businesses. What chore does this 1881 wooden toy imitate?

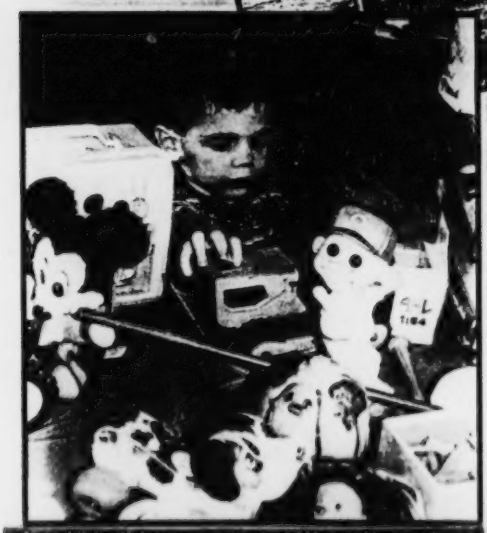


Flea Market Treasures

Yesterday's toys have become big business. Why do *you* think adults are willing to pay high prices for old toys?

New London, Iowa, flea market, August 1997

Old Stuff



An old bulldozer captured Wyatt Knepp's attention at an August 1997 flea market in New London. Wyatt, who is almost three, doesn't necessarily like antiques. Instead, said his mom, Ann, "he likes anything that plays!"

Old Toys are big business for many antique (and fine junk!) dealers. Gary and Karen White of West Burlington buy antiques, including toys, and resell them at flea markets in Iowa and surrounding states.

Hot-selling items go in cycles. "Old stuffed animals and McDonald's toys are popular now," Gary said. "So are Beanie Babies. I wouldn't have them, but they sell!"

Gary said he never gave much thought to what makes something a popular collectible. "If something really catches my eye, if I want it, I get it!" he said. His own collection started with Case tractors, but you won't find any for sale on his table at flea markets. "I've got those at home. Those I don't want to part with."

Sometimes there's a fine line between toys and junk. Or between playthings and prized collectibles. Some people collect for resale value. Others collect because they enjoy the items regardless of monetary value. Either way, half the fun is in the hunt!

–The Editor

Goldfinch

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